A drug overdose is a medical emergency that occurs when a substance is used in sufficient quantity to cause adverse reactions, up to and sometimes including death. Most overdoses are accidental—an unintentional consequence of an active addiction to a dangerous drug.

Responsible media coverage can increase understanding of substance use disorders, and reduce misperceptions about people who suffer from them.

A drug overdose provides an opportunity to educate the community about drug trends (demographics, incidence and prevalence), as well as treatment options and actions needed to prevent future tragedies.

### SUGGESTIONS

- **In photos and videos:**
  - Avoid substance use triggering imagery (e.g., cooking drugs in a spoon, needles)
  - Avoid B-roll of a stereotypical scene (e.g., impoverished neighborhood)
  - Do not use photos/videos of the overdose

- **Speak with a public health professional or an expert on substance use, rather than a first responder or law enforcement officer**

- **Report on overdoses and substance use disorder as a public health issue**

- **Remind your audience to call 911 immediately if they suspect someone is experiencing an overdose**

- **Offer hope – emphasize that:**
  - Treatment works
  - Recovery is possible
  - Overdoses don’t have to be fatal

### SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PREFERRED LANGUAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVOID</th>
<th>PREFERRED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>abuse</td>
<td>use, misuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abuser, user, addict, alcoholic</td>
<td>person with a substance use disorder, person misusing substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bender, off the wagon</td>
<td>relapse, use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clean, sober</td>
<td>in recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rehab</td>
<td>treatment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Try to use “people first” language – naming the person first and the condition second.

### NATIONAL RESOURCES

- drugabuse.gov
- samhsa.gov
- dea.gov
- cdc.gov

NCADA works to reduce or prevent the harms of alcohol and other drug use through education, intervention and advocacy.